

Message Text

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PAGE 01 HALIFA 00419 241533Z
ACTION EUR-12

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SUBJECT: ATLANTIC PROVINCES PREMIERS' REACTIONS TO AUG 18-
19 PREMIERS'S CONFERENCE
REF: OTTAWA 07511

SUMMARY: CONFERENCE WAS DOMINATED BY QUEBEC PREMIER
LEVESQUE'S ATTEMPT TO SELL RECIPROCAL MINORITY LANGUAGE
EDUCATION RIGHTS AGREEMENTS TO OTHER NINE PREMIERS AND
THEIR UNITED STAND AGAINST SUCH AGREEMENTS. CONSTITUTIONAL
ISSUES RECEIVED LITTLE ATTENTION - PREMIERS SEEMED NOT
TO WANT TO REOPEN QUESTION FURTHER COMPLICATED NOW BY
THREATS OF QUEBEC SEPARATISM. NATIONAL UNITY ISSUE WAS
NOT DEALT WITH AS SUCH BUT ONLY INDIRECTLY THRU OTHER
QUESTIONS. PREMIERS AGREED FEDERAL GOVT MUST PROVIDE
MORE CONSTRUCTIVE LEADERSHIP IN HANDLING NATION S
FALTERING ECONOMY BUT OPINIONS AS TO WHAT FORM LEADER-
SHIP SHOULD TAKE AND METHODS TO BE USED VARIED. TOPIC
OF PROVINCIAL ROLE IN CANADIAN/U S RELATIONS FOUND
GENERAL AGREEMENT THAT OTTAWA SHOULD CONSULT MORE
WITH PROVINCES AND THAT FEDERAL GOVT, WHILE HAVING
RESPONSIBILITY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, SHOULD NOT IMPOSE
BUREAUCRATIC HURDLES IN WAY OF TALKS BETWEEN PROVINCES
AND NEIGHBORING U S STATES. THIS IS THE READ OUT
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PAGE 02 HALIFA 00419 241533Z

GIVEN BY SOURCES IN OFFICES OF PREMIERS IN THE FOUR
ATLANTIC PROVINCES. END SUMMARY.

1. CONOFF TALKED WITH SOURCES IN THE OFFICES OF PREMIERS
OF PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND, NEW BRUNSWICK, NEWFOUNDLAND,
AND NOVA SCOTIA. ALL AGREED THAT PREMIERS S CONFERENCE
WAS USEFUL BUT ACCOUNTS OF ISSUES AND INTERPRETATIONS

DIFFERED.

2. MINORITY LANGUAGE EDUCATION RIGHTS - N B SOURCE CALLED THAT STATEMENT BY NINE ENGLISH SPEAKING PREMIERS "QUITE A COUP", SAID THAT LEVESQUE WAS OUT MANUVERED AND PUT IN POSITION WHERE HE COULDN T GRUMBLE. PREMIER HATFIELD (N B) ORGANIZED EFFORT AGAINST RECIPROCAL AGREEMENTS AND DRAFTED TEXT OF STATEMENT ADOPTED BY NINE PREMIERS. PEI, NFLD. AND N S SOURCES AGREED THAT HATFIELD HAD PROVIDED EXCELLENT LEADERSHIP ON ISSUE AND GIVEN NINE PREMIERS AN OPENING TO MAKE POSITIVE STATEMENT. N B SOURCE SAID ACTION CHANGED WHAT HE SAID HAD BEEN PRIMARILY TRUDEAU/LEVESQUE DUEL UNTIL THEN. SOURCES AGREED THAT DEBATE ON LANGUAGE EDUCATION RIGHTS AT CONFERENCE WAS JUST OPENING SHOT IN A LONG STRUGGLE. NEXT STEP WILL BE MEETING OF PROVINCIAL EDUCATION MINISTERS.

3. SOURCES TOLD CONOFF THAT NATIONAL UNITY WAS NOT DEALT WITH EXTENSIVELY AS ISSUE - AT LEAST NOT IN OPEN SESSIONS. CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTIONS, WHICH HAD HAD PROMINENT PLACE AT EARLIER CONFERENCES, WERE GIVEN LITTLE ATTENTION AT ST ANDREWS. IT APPEARS THAT PREMIERS FEARED SUCH QUESTIONS WOULD NOW BE ENDLESSLY COMPLICATED BY THREAT OF QUEBEC SEPARATISM.

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PAGE 03 HALIFA 00419 241533Z

RM ECONOMIC ISSUES - SOURCES NOTED TWO IMPORTANT NEW FACTORS: 1) WHILE LEVESQUE TOOK STRONG SEPARATIST STANCE ON MINORITY EDUCATION RIGHTS, HE WAS A "CANADIAN" PREMIER UNITED WITH HIS FELLOWS ON ALMOST ALL OTHER QUESTIONS, ESPECIALLY ECONOMIC, AND 2) NEW ATLANTIC PROVINCES AND WESTERN PROVINCES ALLIANCE SEEMS TO BE IN MAKING, PARTICULARLY ON NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUE. PREMIERS WERE IN AGREEMENT THAT FEDERAL GOVT MUST PROVIDE GREATER LEADERSHIP IN HANDLING NATION S FALTERING ECONOMY BUT OPINIONS AS TO WHAT FORM LEADERSHIP SHOULD TAKE AND METHODS TO BE USED VARIED. ALL AGREED THAT DATE TO END INFLATIONARY CONTROLS MUST BE SET TO END PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY. MOST FAVORED CONTINUING CONTROLS INTO 1978 BUT THERE WERE DISSENTERS. QUEBEC HAS ALREADY WITHDRAWN FROM AIB. LIKEWISE THERE WAS AGREEMENT ON NEED FOR FEDERAL TAX CUTS BUT NATURE OF CUTS NOT AGREED ON. UNEMPLOYMENT RECOGNIZED AS MAJOR ISSUE AND MANY FELT NEED FOR FEDERAL WORK PROGRAMS IN SHORT TERM THOUGH AWARE THIS CONFLICTS WITH TAX CUTS. LABOR PROBLEMS AND LOW PRODUCTIVITY ALSO DISCUSSED THOUGH WITHOUT RESOLUTION. TRANSPORTATION, WITH ATLANTIC PROVINCES SUPPORTED BY WESTERN PROVINCES

IN STRONG OPPOSITION TO "USER PAY" CONCEPT, RECEIVED ATTENTION. ATLANTIC PROVINCES WERE DELIGHTED TO FIND SUPPORT FROM WEST AND PLEASED TO FIND LITTLE OPPOSITION FROM ONTARIO AND QUEBEC. ATLANTIC PROVINCES POSITION IS THAT NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION POLICY SHOULD BE DEVELOPMENT TOOL AND FEDERAL GOVT SHOULD ASSIST IN MEETING COSTS.

5. U S/CANADIAN RELATIONS - ALBERTA RAISED QUESTION AND WAS SUPPORTED BY OTHER PROVINCES. ALL AGREED THAT OTTAWA SHOULD CONSULT MORE WITH PROVINCES ON ISSUES AFFECTING THEM AND THAT FEDERAL GOVT SHOULD NOT PLACE BUREAUCRATIC OBSTACLES IN WAY OF PROVINCIAL TALKS WITH NEIGHBORING STATES. FEDERAL GOVT ROLE IN DIRECTION OF UNCLASSIFIED

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PAGE 04 HALIFA 00419 241533Z

FOREIGN AFFAIRS WAS NOT CHALLENGED. NFLD SOURCE DESCRIBED THIS ISSUE AS BEING LIKE "MOTHERHOOD AND APPLE PIE" - NO ONE WAS AGAINST IT AND THERE WAS LITTLE REAL DEBATE.

6. COMMENT: SOURCES IN ATLANTIC PROVINCES APPEAR PLEASED WITH ST ANDREWS CONFERENCE - MEETING OF LEVESQUE CHALLENGE, LEADERSHIP ROLE OF HATFIELD, WESTERN PROVINCES SUPPORT ON TRANSPORTATION ISSUE, AND GENERAL USEFUL EXCHANGE OF ISSUES. N B SOURCE TOLD CONOFF THAT THERE WILL BE ANOTHER PREMIERS CONFERENCE IN SIX MONTHS TO FOLLOW-UP. AYLING

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